

Minutes for the Air Quality Task Force for the Imperial Valley – Mexicali Region Meeting

The meeting was held at UABC Mexicali, on March 11th 2004, and it began at approximately 11:15 a.m.

Moderator: Margarito Quintero, Task Force Co-Chair

Attendants: Enriqueta Salazar, from the ITR Mexicali graduate school; Rebeca Morales Andrade, international liaison for the Clean Air Initiative; Candido Zatarain from the Mexicali Municipal Directorate of Ecology; Marco Antonio Reyna, researcher from the UABC Engineering Research Institute; Carlos Yruretagoyena, from CREAS; Ana Alicia Salgado from General Ecology Directorate (DGE); Carlos de la Parra, from SEMARNAT; Margarito Quintero, from UABC; Kimberly Collins, SDSU Imperial Valley; Fernando Medina, Border Power Plant Working Group; Hernando Marquez, State Congress Health Commission (Baja California); Christine Vineyard, US EPA; Brad Poiriez and Reyes Romero, both from Imperial County Air Pollution Control District; David Fege, US EPA; Monica Appel, from Appel Consulting; Vivian Perez, from American Lung Association Clean Air Initiative in Imperial County; Luis Velez, from Comité Cívico del Valle.

1. The attendants introduced themselves and stated which organization they work for.
2. Update of Task Force activities.

Comments on the event held in Rosarito on March 2nd and 3rd in which the Border 2012 Regional Workgroup and the California – Baja California Task Forces met:

- Kimberly Collins stated a draft implementation plan of the Imperial – Mexicali Air Quality Task Force has been generated. One of the main objectives of this meeting is to discuss that implementation plan and to obtain feedback on projects that can be added to that plan.
- There were comments from Carlos de la Parra and other participants regarding the need for similar events to be held more often, as well as the need for improved communication in every direction; between task force co-chairs and also the need to improve the coordination of local air quality task forces with border wide efforts.
- Carlos Yruretagoyena commented on issues not adequately addressed at the event, which include the environmental impact of two new energy production plants in the area; and the search for alternative sources of energy which could be promoted and funded by these energy production companies. Also, the need to monitor the emissions from automobiles and to educate the public regarding this problem.

3. Review of Implementation Plan Draft by Kimberly Collins and Margarito Quintero.

Copies of the draft were provided to the attendants. This document includes

- Background information of the binational Air Quality Task Force.
- Goals and objectives of the Task Force.

- Why it's necessary to look at the region as a binational air shed and to develop binational projects to clean up the air.
- A project to review current programs and strategies in the Imperial – Mexicali Valley.
- There is still the need to identify and develop concrete projects to clean up the air.

Christine Vineyard described the forms that have been filled out regarding goals and objectives and main priorities; and the forms that still need to be filled out regarding ongoing projects, planned activities and funding needs, to be included as part of the Task Force implementation plan. So far funding has been set aside by EPA for the meetings. The EPA Air Division is also willing to supply logistical support, the ongoing discussion is how to get that money to the Task Force.

A suggestion was made by Carlos Yruretagoyena to find an NGO on the U.S. side that would administer the funds for the Task Force: this NGO would receive the funds from EPA and contract the Task Force to develop specific projects. There was discussion of whether the problem was in finding an NGO to implement this mechanism or whether there is a problem in releasing federal funds to the local Task Forces.

The local government officials who were present were requested to talk about the projects that they consider viable for the region.

Brad Poiriez and Reyes Romero, talked about ongoing projects the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District:

- A wind blown dust study, developed with a grant from EPA to look at emissions inventory for Imperial County in regards with PM-10. The final report is due out at the end of March. Preliminary reports indicate the majority of PM-10 emissions in Imperial County come from unpaved roadways and open areas, a majority of which are agricultural areas.
- An international emission reduction credit program, also funded by EPA. In this program companies on the U.S. side of the border would partner with a company in Mexicali and pay for emission control equipment to be installed and utilized at their facility to reduce emissions. These quantifiable surplus emissions would be calculated and transferred to the company that paid for the equipment, and they may be used to offset any emissions they may have if they were to modify a facility or start a new one.
- And Imperial County and APCD project for promoting the use of compressed natural gas fuel. The Calexico Unified School District has obtained 100 thousand dollar grant through the California Energy Commission towards infrastructure of a CNG facility. The Air District committed 150 thousand towards a natural gas fueling facility to be located in Calexico at the School District maintenance yard. Construction will begin by the end of April. The requirement is that there is public access 24 hours, 7 days a week. Expanding the infrastructure is the first step, the next step is convincing major fleet operators in Imperial County to convert their fleets to natural gas.
- A future project to establish a funding mechanism for paving local roads in Imperial County, similar to what is being done in Mexicali through NAD Bank.

- A website being setup by APCD and the State Air Resources Board, to provide the community immediate information on air quality monitoring, and also on forecasts of ozone levels for the following day. If we anticipate problems in the air quality we will send notices to schools and hospitals so people can take precautions to minimize the negative effects. Funding for this project is already available for Imperial; one suggestion is that it could be extended to Mexicali.

Carlos de la Parra from SEMARNAT mentioned that this year one of the goals of SEMARNAT is to link four cities in Mexico to the National System for Information on Air Quality (SINAICA). Two of those four cities will be Mexicali and Tijuana. This implies being responsible on the Mexican side for monitoring and recording air quality in Mexicali and Tijuana and publishing the results in a website. This is a huge task, a long term project that may take up to two years to implement. The California Air Resources Board and the local authorities are involved in this project and the first steps have already been taken.

Candido Zatarain described the projects by the Mexicali Municipal Directorate of Ecology:

- A current project is the Mexicali Air Quality Program 2000 – 2005. The program to pave local roads is part of this and it is already underway with a huge investment.
- A program will be started to verify vehicular emissions from municipal public transportation vehicles which are being upgraded. The first goal is to modernize the public transportation vehicles which are obsolete and highly contaminating. Public education on this issue will be the next goal since vehicular emission verification will have to become mandatory. Studies have shown that transportation is one of the main sources of air pollution in the area.

Marco Antonio Reyna referred to a research grant offered by the State Government of Baja California for projects that deal with problems in the region. The complaint that was stated is that this grant does not contemplate air quality issues as one of the priorities. Ana Alicia Salgado from DGE stated that she would bring this to the attention of her superiors so that it would be included in the next publication of the grant, which will be announced by the end of the year.

Margarito Quintero read a message he received from Gabriel Ruiz, regarding a project to publish air quality data in real time. The message stated Mr. Ruiz is working on a contract for the development of the technical elements required to obtain raw data, the conversion of such data to an air quality index and the publication of this information in real time on an internet website. This contract also stipulates daily forecasts of ozone concentration levels during the months of March through September and the creation of an identification system that would allow users to subscribe to receive forecasts and warnings when air pollution exceeds the norm. This is similar to what Reyes commented and the goal is to have this done on both sides of the border simultaneously; and it is also related to the national program by SINAICA as described by Carlos de la Parra.

Saul Guzman, the co-chair for the Air Quality Task Force in the San Diego – Tijuana area introduced himself and excused himself for being late. He referred to a conversation with Sergio Sanchez and Gabriel Ruiz, in which the possibility of extending the air quality monitoring project to Mexicali was discussed, even though the funding is currently available only for Imperial Valley. Two monitoring stations were visited, one in Tijuana and the other in Rosarito, with the purpose of evaluating the possibility of including these in the national air monitoring program, which would be a start towards this goal of having the air quality data published online.

Carlos Yruretagoyena suggested the creation of a mobile school, by using a converted truck or bus that could be adapted to receive a transmission signal. It could visit neighborhoods and schools to educate children and teachers on what is being done to improve air quality in Mexicali, and it could also serve to warn people when the air quality represents a hazard. Several companies could sponsor this project by donating products, and this unit could be used on both sides of the border for education purposes.

Saul Guzman talked about local Pro-Aires teams which are being reactivated in Tijuana. Pro-Aires was published in 2000 in Tijuana and Mexicali, but there have not been any follow ups. Pro-Aires has a thematic structure with 5 main topics that may serve as a basis to develop the action plan for the Task Forces.

Candido Zatarain talked about complaints from the public in Mexicali regarding agricultural burns in Imperial Valley. He asked for the reason behind these burns and if the health hazards they pose to residents on both sides of the border have been considered.

Brad Poiriez responded by talking about their Ag-Burn program. According to the Health and Safety Code, agricultural burning cannot be prohibited, only regulated. Many measures are taken to minimize the impact of the smoke that is generated, even though it constitutes less than 4% of emissions in Imperial Valley.

Monica Appel talked about an environmental fund being set up at CANACINTRA. Industries are being asked for contributions to support environmental work. This will lead to research projects to improve local air quality. This task force could present to CANACINTRA the projects they are working on to see how CANACINTRA can offer support.

4. Open forum for questions and comments.

Carlos Yruretagoyena asked if an agreement could be reached on how the funds for the projects will be transferred.

Christine Vineyard responded by explaining how the funds are allocated for Border 2012 projects. She mentioned that the EPA Office of Air also has funds available which are committed to providing logistical support to the Task Force and the issue now lies in selecting an organization to administer the grant. The Air Office also finances the Binational Monitoring Network, as well as provide funds for the Bilingual Air Quality

and Health Information Center. EPA has also invested money for a border wide emissions inventory, that will supply baseline information for the Task Force work.

5. Comments by attendants on current ongoing projects.

Kimberly Collins talked about an SDSU project to research environmental culture in Mexicali and Calexico, through in depth interviews with residents on their views of the environment and how their activities relate to it. The goal is to develop sustainable behaviors.

Margarito Quintero talked about a project to develop a pollination map of the Mexicali region to see which types of pollens are present and provide the information to the public and to the medical community, to help reduce the incidence of allergic diseases.

Marco Antonio Reyna mentioned a project to measure the main pollutants in the area: Carbon Monoxide, PM-10 and ozone. The level of contaminants will be monitored along with climatic conditions and the incidence of asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

Enriqueta Salazar thanked the co-chairs for the invitation and expressed ITR's interest in participating in these types of projects.

Rebeca Morales Andrade extended an invitation to the Imperial and Mexicali Valley's Binational Environmental Conference on April 7th from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Araiza Inn, in Mexicali. The event is sponsored by American Lung Association Clean Air Initiative.

Carlos Yruretagoyena talked about activities in the area of environmental education, such as workshops being held in schools in Mexicali; and several curricula which are being developed, such as community leadership and ecology for beginners.

Saul Guzman suggested linking efforts between the San Diego – Tijuana Task Force and the Imperial Valley – Mexicali Task Force. Another suggestion was that those who have materials for environmental education post them on the Task Force web page.

Kimberly Collins talked about the next meeting date, in May and questioned whether the meeting time should be changed to the afternoon. After some discussion the group agreed the meeting time would remain the same, 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The date for the meeting was established as Thursday May 13th.

Margarito Quintero adjourned the session at approximately 1:15 p.m.